

A Report to the Legislature
**Forest Health Improvement
Program**

September 2006



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

This report was prepared by the
Washington State Department of Natural Resources

September 2006

For more information, contact:

Bruce Mackey
Lands Steward
(360) 902-1101

Michael Eklund-Grayum
Governmental Relations Director
(360) 902-1015

Preface

In 2004, the Legislature passed the Forest Health Improvement Act¹ which authorized the state's Commissioner of Public Lands to contract for the harvest of timber where forested state trust lands have either overly dense forest stands or other serious threats negatively affecting the health of the forests. The Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide "a summary of sales carried out under the contract harvesting program primarily for silvicultural treatments that are permitted under...this act."² This report is the required summary.

DNR strives to grow healthy productive forests to contribute revenue to the state's trusts, ensure diverse habitat, and provide multiple benefits for the people of the state.

Forest Health Improvement Program

The Legislature has found that, "Washington faces serious forest health problems where forests are overcrowded or trees are infested with or susceptible to insects, diseases, wind, ice storms, and fire. The causes and contributions to these susceptible conditions include fire suppression, past timber harvesting and silvicultural practices, and the amplified risks that occur when the urban interface penetrates forest land."³ As part of that finding, the Legislature directed DNR to establish and implement a plan for state-owned forest lands with the objective being to increase forest resistance and resilience to forest insects, disease, wind, and fire.

In order to help achieve the Legislature's expectations of creating healthy forests on state trust lands, DNR uses the Contract Harvesting method of harvesting timber and selling log sorts. Log sorts are a selection of logs that can be used for a singular end-use product, such as two-by-fours, sheeting for plywood, or logs for log homes. The Contract Harvesting program provides an economical mechanism to thin areas of overly dense forests that are at-risk to disease, insects, wind, and fire. Unlike traditional silvicultural treatment methods, the costs for implementing Forest Health Improvement projects, also called "thinnings", are paid for directly from revenues generated by selling the small wood debris from the forest stands being treated. Using this method makes this program self-sustaining. Thus, the underlying risks to both forest health and fire hazards are treated, and at the same time, the net present value of the residual stands is increased.

¹ Chapter 218, Laws of 2004. (2SSB 6144)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Historically, DNR has funded treatments for low-value, unhealthy and at-risk timber stands through allocation of available management funds. However, the cost to address the number of acres in need of immediate treatment has far exceeded available funding. With this legislation, DNR is now authorized to market specific log types through Contract Harvesting. The proceeds from these forest health sales are deposited into the Contract Harvesting Revolving Account, and the expenses of the sales are paid from this account. Enabling DNR to pay for the costs of these sales directly from the revenue derived from the sale of the delivered log sorts allows the agency to improve the condition of the forest today. Important as well is the fact that it provides for a high return from these lands in the future. In other words, the thinnings pay for themselves and result in a healthy and economically viable forest today and for the future. Healthier forests equate to increased benefits to the environment and increased value for trust beneficiaries over time.

Summary of Sales Carried Out Primarily for Silvicultural Treatments

DNR has prepared and sold six Forest Health Improvement sales since the Forest Health Improvement Act (2SSB 6144) was passed. Harvest activity has been completed on two sales and four sales are currently active. Eight more sales are scheduled for sale between September 2006 and the end of the current biennium, June 30, 2007.

About 620 acres have been thinned with the completed sales; 9,330 acres are either active harvests or are scheduled for harvest in fiscal year 2007. Following are a few details about the sales.

Completed Forest Improvement Sales

The Flowery Trail project was conducted in conjunction with a U.S. Forest Service fuels reduction project in a high fire risk wildland/urban interface area. The Naneum Ridge 1 project treated an extremely dense forest stand that was experiencing mortality due to over-stocking and disease.

Table 1. Completed forest improvement contract sales

Sale Name	DNR Region	Acres	Risk Factors
Flowery Trail FI Sorts	Northeast	154	High fire risk, dwarf mistletoe, mountain pine beetle
Naneum Ridge 1 FI Sorts	Southeast	466	Overstocked, disease
Total		620	

Active and Planned Forest Improvement Sales

Several forest stands have been selected because of their great risk for catastrophic loss from fire due to fuel build up in dense stand conditions. The same conditions have also increased the risk of stand collapse and mortality from disease and insect damage.

Table 2. Active forest improvement contract sales

Sale Name	DNR Region	Acres	Risk Factors
Sherrylock FI Sorts	Northeast	826	High fire risk, dwarf mistletoe, mountain pine beetle
Chattawood FI Sorts	Northeast	530	Mountain pine beetle
Naneum Ridge 2 FI Sorts	Southeast	786	Overstocked, disease
Rattlesnake FI Sorts	Southeast	324	Overstocked
Total		2,466	

Table 3. Scheduled forest improvement contract sales

Sale Name	DNR Region	Acres	Risk Factors
Bucky DePue FI Sorts	Northeast	900	Mountain pine beetle, dwarf mistletoe
Dunngo FI Sorts	Northeast	672	Dwarf mistletoe
Martin FI Sorts	Northeast	334	Overstocked, fir beetle, dwarf mistletoe
Lilienthal FI Sorts	Northeast	946	Mountain pine beetle, dwarf mistletoe
Snow Trout FI Sorts	Southeast	1,204	Overstocked
South Nasty FI Sorts	Southeast	470	Overstocked
Badger Mountain FI Sorts	Southeast	175	Overstocked. Fire risk on urban interface.
Divide FI Sorts	Southeast	700	Overstocked
Mizer FI Sorts	Southeast	489	Overstocked, bark beetle, dwarf mistletoe
Tamarack Junction FI Sorts	Southeast	674	Overstocked
Belfair Phase 1 FI Sorts	South Puget Sound	300	Overstocked
Total		6,864	

Conclusions

DNR has successfully implemented the Forest Health Improvement program. Thousands of acres of forested state trust lands are benefiting and will continue to benefit from DNR's ability to conduct silvicultural treatments to prevent catastrophic loss and improve the health of remaining trees. The treatments have attracted a new market for the materials that are removed from the forest stands, and these new markets are benefiting local communities that are home to businesses producing wood products. Continued legislative support for this program will allow DNR to treat additional acres beyond those funded in the operational budget.